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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03
NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 AID-05 ACDA-05
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R 311501Z OCT 75
FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3287
INFO USIA WASHDC

[REDACTED] BUENOS AIRES 7193

E. O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, SOPN, AR
SUBJECT: NEW THREAT TO FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

ARGENTINA PROJECT (S200000044)

U.S. DEPT. OF STATE, A/RPS/IPS

Margaret P. Grafeld, Director

☒ Release () Excise () Deny

Exemption(s):

Declassify: () In Part ☒ In Full

() Classify as () Extend as () Downgrade to

Date Declassify on Reason

REFS: A. BA 3557 AND B. BA 5095

SUMMARY. A COMMUNIQUE FROM THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR HAS AGAIN HIGHLIGHTED THE PRECARIOUS STATE OF FREEDOM OF THE PRESS IN ARGENTINA. REACTION TO THE DOCUMENT IN PRESS AND EVEN SOME OFFICIAL CIRCLES HAS BEEN WIDESPREAD AND GENERALLY NEGATIVE. THE MOST DISTURBING ASPECT OF THE SITUATION MAY BE THE SOURCE OF THE THREAT.

1. ON OCT 28 THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR, THROUGH THE PRESIDENTIAL PRESS SECRETARIAT, ISSUED A "CALL FOR REFLECTION AND RESPONSIBILITY" TO THE MEDIA IN WHICH IT WARNED JOURNALISTS TO AVOID "SOURCELESS REPORTS, ASSUMPTIONS, SPECULATION, FALSE INFORMATION AND OTHER FORMS OF UNDERMINING INSTITUTIONS AND CONFUSING PUBLIC OPINION." THESE TACTICS, THE COMMUNIQUE ADDED, "DIRECTLY OR INDIRECTLY AID...THE MULTIPLE, MANY FACETED, SUBTLE, AND INSIDIOUS PSYCHOLOGICAL ACTION (OF SUBVERSION)." THE STATEMENT CONCLUDED THAT "THE AUTHORITIES WILL GUARANTEE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION BUT WILL BE INFLEXIBLE IN THE ADOPTION OF MEASURES THAT THE LAWS CONTEMPLATE FOR THOSE WHO DETRACT FROM OR DISTORT IT."

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2. REACTION IN PRESS AND EVEN SOME OFFICIAL CIRCLES HAS BEEN WIDESPREAD AND GENERALLY NEGATIVE. CRONISTA CALLED THE COMMUNIQUE "AMBIGUOUS", PRENSA SAID IT IS A "DIRECT THREAT TO FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION" AND OPINION THEORIZED THAT "THE MINISTRY (OF INTERIOR) APPEARS TO EMBODY THE SPIRIT WITH WHICH OFFICIALDOM IS WORKING IN PREPARING SANCTIONS AGAINST THE PRESS DESTINED TO BE PART OF AN 'OMNIBUS BILL' DEALING WITH QUESTIONS OF SECURITY AND DEFENSE BY CONSIDERING AS SUBVERSIVE ALL NEWS ABOUT IRREGULARITIES IN THE GOVERNMENT AND THE (JUSTICIALIST) PARTY." SOME LEGISLATORS AND THE BUENOS AIRES CITY COUNCIL HAVE ALSO EXPRESSED RESERVATIONS ABOUT THE COMMUNIQUE AND ITS "VAGUENESS" AND "UNUSUAL" NATURE.

3. FONMIN CASTEX ON OCT 29 EXPRESSED TO AMB HILL HIS OPINION THAT THE GOVT FEELS THAT OPINION, CRONISTA, AND THE BUENOS AIRES HERALD HAVE GONE TOO FAR IN THEIR CRITICISM OF THE GOVT, THAT THEY ARE ACTIVELY AIDING AND ABETTING SUBVERSION, AND IMPLIED THAT ACTION MIGHT BE TAKEN AGAINST THEM.

4. COMMENT: THE MOST DISTURBING ASPECT OF THE SITUATION MAY BE THE SOURCE OF THE THREAT. ON PAST OCCASIONS (SEE REFTELS) WHEN FREEDOM OF THE PRESS APPEARED TO BE IN JEOPARDY THE PRESIDENTIAL PRESS SECRETARIAT WAS THE DIRECT SOURCE OF THE PRESSURE. THE SHIFT TO THE MUCH MORE POWERFUL AND POLITICAL INTERIOR MINISTRY IS PARTICULARLY OMINOUS IF, AS APPEARS TO BE THE CASE, THE GOVT INTENDS TO USE THE LEGITIMATE SUBVERSION ISSUE AS A COVER TO INTIMIDATE OR OTHERWISE SILENCE ITS MEDIA CRITICS.
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